

Digital Archiving: Questions, Problems, Examples and Answers(?)¹

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There are as many definitions of “digital archiving” as there are methods. When is archiving really “archiving” and when only a simple backup? Is one better than the other and if so, why?

There are a number of well-known digital archiving units specialized in the humanities, such as the Archaeology Data Service (ADS) in York, GB or the Data Archiving and Networked Service (DANS) in Den Haag, NL. These are well established institutions, but not the only instances of archaeological digital archiving practice. Everyone producing digital data is sooner or later confronted with the question of what to do with it. Which practices are in place? Are there some success stories? Do we all have common problems? Has the OAIS standard been widely adopted, or is a simpler system more widely preferred—such as simple, descriptive digital folder systems?

What, even, is the definition of “archiving”? Does it mean preserving the data for a predefined length of time? Or, should it always mean “permanent preservation”? Can we accept visual representations or do we have to preserve functions connected with the data? Permanent preservation meaning the inclusion of the necessary functionality/integrity/form needed to continue to keep the data meaningful, useful and accessible into the future. Which methods can guarantee continued usability?

Where is archiving taking place and what data is actually being preserved? What is selected for preservation and what is discarded? Are any guidelines in place to help make these decisions? What about low-cost archiving, what about less rigorous alternatives, are they safe enough?

This round table considered all these aspects (and more). In this round table digital archivists learned from each other’s experiences and hopefully receive new impulses for their important daily work.

¹ in cooperation with the Federal Monuments Authority Austria